

22 JUL 2003

Myanmar-Mahathir

RAZALI: PM'S OPINION INDICATES NEED FOR STANDARD OF BEHAVIOUR IN ASEAN

KUALA LUMPUR, July 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's opinion that Myanmar may be expelled from Asean if it continues to defy international pressure to release Aung San Suu Kyi is a progressive statement indicating the need for a standard of behaviour in Asean, Tan Sri Razali Ismail said today.

"This is obviously the statement that has caught the imagination of all Malaysians. It is a progressive statement because it indicates the need to have the standard of behaviour within Asean," said Razali, who is the United Nations special envoy to Myanmar.

"There must be a minimum standard of behaviour within the countries in Asean," Razali told reporters after the signing of an underwriting agreement for the listing of Salcon Bhd, of which he is chairman.

"The conduct of governments must win the support of all the people," he said, expressing the opinion echoed by the prime minister.

"People are looking at all leaders of Asean to do something for Myanmar, for Suu Kyi and the democracy there," he said.

Razali is the only independent person to meet the democracy activist since her detention on May 30, following violent clashes between her supporters and supporters of the Myanmar military junta.

In a recent interview with a foreign news agency released over the weekend, Dr Mahathir said that Myanmar may be expelled from the regional grouping if it continues to defy international pressure.

However, he made it clear that such a move would only be considered as a last resort.

Dr Mahathir has played a major role in making possible Myanmar's membership in Asean in 1997.

Asked whether there should be a time-frame for Myanmar to free Suu Kyi, Razali said that there should not be.

"It is not a business deal, so why a time-frame. I know the urgency is there but these are things that are so intricate and need a lot of efforts to get things done," he said.

He said that a firm stance by Asean leaders would be helpful to resolve the Myanmar issue and put back on track the process of democracy.

Asean is scheduled to send a troika to Myanmar regarding the issue and the UN is awaiting the decision by Asean, Razali said.

The release of Suu Kyi and the installation of democracy in Myanmar is a major issue ahead of the annual gathering of the Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) of foreign ministers in Bali tomorrow and Thursday.

-- BERNAMA

MSL JM RM